

It's Not About Being Perfect

Luke 18:9-14

Lesson 10

Exploring Faith Bible Study Series

Lesson Purpose:

This lesson is designed to open the eyes of sinners to the grace of God. We may be inclined to get all cleaned up before we come to God. However, God doesn't work that way. This section of scripture helps us to see His grace. Jesus invites us to come with all of our flaws and sins to receive His forgiveness and love.

Icebreaker:

Invite the group to make a list of definitions for these two words: Humility and Perfection.

Life Connections:

Use these questions to help your group members to begin to open up with one another and to think about their own lives. The answers to these questions need not be spiritual in nature. The intention is for practical real life responses.

- 1) What are you really good at? My job; raising my kids; water skiing; making people laugh.
- 2) What are you really terrible at? Singing; cooking; organizing; driving.
- 3) How do the things we do well and the things we do poorly make us feel? Proud and foolish; happy and sad; pleased and disappointed.
- 4) How do you feel when someone else brags about something they do well? Angry; annoyed; I roll my eyes at them.
- 5) What does it mean to be humble? Not to brag; to let other people walk all over you, to do things well without wanting anyone to praise you for it.

Scripture's Answers: Luke 18:9-14

In this section the Life Connection questions are now related to the passage of Scripture being used in this Bible Study. The answers to the following questions should come from the text as well as out of the individual's hearing and understanding of what they have heard read. Have a member of the group read the Scripture passage aloud for all to hear. Make sure extra Bibles are available so everyone can follow along.

NOTE: In this lesson the Scripture passage is broken into two sections. At this point in your group discussion have a member read only Luke 18:9-13.

Introduction:

Jesus is teaching about common occurrences in His day. Going to the temple to pray was something both Jews and Gentiles did multiple times each day. Some would pray about their goodness so others could hear. This is what the Pharisee is doing in this story. The Pharisees in Jesus' time tended to be very proud of their ability to follow the law and in so doing believed they pleased God. We must remember that not all Pharisees were like this one in Jesus' story, but some of them did have wrong attitudes about other people. The Pharisees were well known members of society as is the other character in this story, the tax collector. Commonly in Jesus' day people made assumptions about these two individuals; the righteous Pharisee and the sinful tax collector. Jesus uses these assumptions to explain how God views people. We find He views them much differently than we do.

Scripture:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

Teaching Time:

Say to your group: "We need to first understand who the Pharisees and tax collectors were in Jesus' day. The Pharisees were a religious group who tried their hardest to obey the law given in the first testament of the Bible. They had all kinds of rules to govern the way they lived. They believed because they were following these laws they were obeying what God was calling them to do. The tax collectors, on the other hand, were considered some of the worst members of society. All too often they took more than the taxes they were required to collect so they could live extravagantly. The Pharisees were generally looked upon with favor in society. The tax collectors were generally despised.

6) If you were in the temple, how would you feel about what the Pharisee was saying? I would think he thought a lot of himself; I would ignore him; I might agree with him.

7) Why would it be acceptable for the Pharisee to talk about himself in this way? Because he follows the law; because he is better than those he listed; because he is doing what God wanted him to do.

8) How do you think God feels about the Pharisee? Proud because he is following the law; He probably agrees with the Pharisee that it is better not to be like the robbers and evildoers.

9) How would you feel about what the tax collector was saying? I think he would need to ask for forgiveness; I would wonder if he were sincere; I would think that he was hoping to feel better about himself; I would feel sorry for him.

10) How do you think God feels about the tax collector? Angry at what he is doing to people; probably sad that he isn't following the law like the Pharisee; I bet He isn't even listening to the tax collector.

Teaching Time:

Say to your group: "Let's read the whole passage of Scripture. Without the last verse we really miss out on what Jesus was teaching the people."

NOTE: Invite someone to read the entire passage again and include verse 14.

11) How does this last verse change what you thought about the situation? I thought the Pharisee was right and the tax collector was wrong; I didn't think God would have listened to such a bad person; I am surprised, it wasn't what I expected.

12) How has this changed your perspective of God? He cares about more people than I thought He did; He doesn't like it when people give themselves compliments; He even listens to sinners.

13) When people talk about coming to church or accepting Jesus what do you think they expect of you? That you will be perfect; that you are a good person; that you won't swear or drink.

14) How does this passage of Scripture challenge those concepts? God doesn't expect you to be perfect; anyone can come to God, even bad people.

Teaching Time:

Say to your group: "Some people believe that to come to church or invite Jesus into their hearts means they have to be good already. Sometimes we can be convinced that God only wants us if we are perfect. But we see in this part of Scripture that the person who thought he was perfect, the Pharisee, was confused. God doesn't want us to come to Him and proclaim how good we are, because in reality we aren't good. He wants us to admit that there are things in our lives we don't really like, habits that aren't good, and actions hurtful to ourselves and others. Why? So He can help us. God doesn't expect us to fix ourselves, He expects us to come to Him so we can be changed by His great love."

Reflection:

Invite the group to take a moment to reflect silently on the questions you are going to ask. These questions can be answered or you may choose to allow the members of the group to think about them.

- 15) Have you imagined God would never love you because of something you did in the past?
- 16) Did you know God loves even the worst person in the world and wants that person to come to him?
- 17) What in your life is holding you back from coming to God and asking him to change your life?

Optional Activity Time:

As a way to make the reflection more meaningful in the lives of group members there are two activities to engage in. First, give the group time to write the answers to the reflection questions in a journal they can keep throughout the study time and the week to come. Second, send each group member home with these questions to think about and write about in a journal during the week. When the group gathers together the next time, break the group up into smaller groups and give them the opportunity to share what they have been thinking about since they last met.

Conclusion:

Take time to pray together before the group leaves. Allow group members to share insights and ask questions they may have.

Teaching Time

Say to your group: "We all have choices to make in our lives. Will we choose to remain in the place we now are or will we move forward? God is inviting us to move forward to be with Him. Will you make the decision to follow Christ, knowing He does not look at you differently because of what you have done in the past? He is waiting for you to come to Him so He can forgive you and fill you with His love."

Possible Prayer

Lord Jesus,
Thank You that we don't have to be all cleaned up and perfect to come to You. Thank You for Your love and forgiveness. We thank You for accepting us no matter what we have done. Help us to be willing, like the tax collector, to ask for and receive the mercy You so freely give.
Amen.